

Agenda Item: 2

Date: January 26, 2022

Commission Action Date: February 9, 2022

TO: Parks & Recreation Commission

FROM: Stacey Zarazua, Recreation Manager

SUBJECT: City Tree protocols and policies for removal

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Parks & Recreation Commission receive a report on City tree protocols and policies for removal.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

The City Tree Master Plan was first adopted by Council in 1979 with revisions made in 1982 and 1986. In September 2018, the Tree Advisory Committee began a comprehensive review and revision of the existing City Tree Master Plan. The Tree Advisory Committee reviewed and approved the final draft of the updated and revised City Tree Master Plan during the December 12, 2019 meeting. Additional input to the plan was provided by Public Works and Community Development Departments. At the November 9, 2020 City Council meeting, Council adopted the 2020 City Tree Master Plan and directed staff to continue to follow and support the major policies of the plan.

The City of Ventura is home to over 30,000 public trees located within parks, medians, landscaped parkways, and streets. In 1979, Council adopted the initial Street Tree Master Plan to provide:

- A policy document to guide decision making
- A planning guide for new programs and projects for use by staff and developers
- A framework for theme street planting
- Designation of the official city tree, the Red Flowering Gum (*Corymbia ficifolia*, formerly *Eucalyptus ficifolia*).

The Tree Master plan had been updated and adopted by Council in 1982 and 1986 and most recently in 2020. Environmental and climate changes that have happened in the last several decades require a current analysis as well as any needed updates.

The City Tree Master Plan (CTMP) (Attachment A) is a guide to the essentials of effective administration and management of a comprehensive Urban Forest program in the City. The benefit that street trees offer is immeasurable and considered one of the most valuable long-term assets that cities have. It is generally recognized that street trees offer many worthwhile and desirable benefits when thoughtfully planned and maintained. It is well documented that properties increase in actual dollar value when decorated by street trees. Trees provide other functional and aesthetic values such as:

- Reduce pollution through recycling air and water
- Sequester carbon emissions
- Cool streets, helping to maintain the asphalt for a longer period
- Lower temperatures in the shade about 10 degrees
- Produce oxygen
- Provide sound dampening from traffic and other noises
- Acting as wind buffers
- Give a sense of formality
- Provides habitat for a variety of animals

Street trees have been a traditional and historical part of the City's growth and development for over a half a century. Prior to the 1960s, the City had very few blocks that were consistently planted with street trees. Where street trees did exist, it was apparently done by the original home developer and were trees of mixed species and age. In the increasing endeavors to create a beautiful city, many varieties of trees were tried. Most were exotic and were not native to the coastal region. Some were fast growing and short-lived species; some proved to be unsuitable for the existing conditions though many have proven to be satisfactory long-lived trees.

As with most early development, it was difficult to envision the tremendous growth which the City would experience in future years. There was no formalized street tree program, although some essential trimming and emergency work was performed by City personnel. While the City continued to grow and the number of street trees increased, it became apparent that some consideration must be given to such things as size and relationship of the tree to the street, its shape and branching habits, its adaptability to climate and soil, flowering and fruiting habits, susceptibility to insect pests and diseases, and its longevity. Because of these and other factors, it became necessary to initiate a street tree program which provides standards and guidelines relative to the type of trees which may be planted in a given area, the size of the parkways in new developments, tree removal and replacement, sidewalk disruptions in the root zone, and aspects of ownership, control, and maintenance.

Over time, trees must be replaced due to the species being inappropriate for its location, or it is at the end of its life cycle; this is normal and to be expected. These and other

considerations evolved into the existing street tree program which encompasses the cities public trees. The program is evidenced by an Urban Forestry section within the Parks Division and street tree standards as established by City Ordinance 2000-23. This ordinance is included in the appendices of the CMTP; the appendices also include but is not limited to, a City Tree Census, tree placement specifications, Engineering Standard S-110, a list of acceptable trees for new planting, and a list of prohibited trees. The compilation of the ordinances, policies, codes, specifications, and procedures which relate to street trees and their maintenance establishes the basic platform and legal basis for the day-to-day administration of the Street Tree Program. From this platform recommendations and decisions can be made and evaluated which will help ensure that the City will derive the greatest value from its street trees. The selection of tree species that will perform their functions satisfactorily must not be simply random choices if challenges are to be minimized. The section of the CTMP on Street Tree Selection Methodology outlines the primary factors and characteristics which must be considered in the process of specifying street trees. Addressing empty tree wells in the City must be part of any strategy for future tree plantings recognizing limitations due to staffing, watering, and location of specific tree wells.

The CTMP provides an overview of 28 selected arterial streets. These streets receive some of the highest levels of traffic flow and therefore are most observed by the public. CMTP serves to establish these streets as Theme Streets. Recommendations for theme planting came from the original field survey on the Theme Streets conducted in 1978-79 which identified 21 arterial streets; subsequent surveys identified an additional 7 arterial street identifiers. Some of these streets have several species which have required years to accomplish desired uniformity, while others were completed in less time. It is recognized that additional streets may also be worthy of consideration to be designated as theme streets now or in the future. It is the intent of the CMTP to increase and maintain awareness of these situations and guide staff in developing future tree plantings and to bring old and established areas into harmony with current practices and needs with the least cost and confusion. Residential streets are not specifically addressed except where the 28 major streets run through residential sections. However, the ordinances, policies and other information apply to all street trees in general.

To ensure public input the City had a Tree Advisory Committee (TAC) with members of five appointed citizens, sitting for 4 years each. Beginning In late 2021, TAC became an ad-hoc committee of Parks and Recreation Commission, meeting only an as needed basis for hearing tree appeals and other work as assigned by City Council, City Manager/designee, for research and consideration (Attachment B).

Major Policies of the Plan

Policy Statement 1

The City reconfirms its position that the Street Tree Program is an important facet in the improvement of the community.

Policy Statement 2

The City shall continue to exercise direction over the supervision of the planting, trimming, pruning, cutting, maintenance, removal and replacement of all trees and shrubs in the streets of the City in accordance with the Code of Ordinances, 2000-23.

Policy Statement 3

Any proposed street tree plantings should first be considered from the standpoint of the safety of people using or passing along the streets. Of secondary consideration is the benefit, embellishment or enhancement of the properties abutting a street.

Policy Statement 4

Every attempt shall be made to incorporate the Red Flowering Gum, the Official City Tree, into the landscaping in and around designated, large open spaced entrances to the City of San Buenaventura, particularly as they are improved or developed. The use of this tree will be encouraged in other areas of high visibility in order to draw attention to our City Trees if the tree can be safely managed and maintained.

Policy Statement 5

The Tree Advisory ad hoc committee will review appeals of the Urban Forestry Division decisions on tree removal requests at an open, public meeting and render a decision. Staff will abide by the decision of the Tree Advisory Board.

Policy Statement 6

The Urban Forestry Division of the Parks and Recreation Department will continue to work closely with the Public Works Department on the systematic replacement of sidewalks damaged by City trees.

Policy Statement 7

The City continues to place a high priority on quality tree maintenance. Prioritization will continue to emphasize potential hazards and trimming to encourage healthy well-structured trees while providing clearance for pedestrians and vehicular traffic.

Tree Removals

Tree removals are directed by the Parks Manager in consultation with the City Tree Coordinator and the Parks Supervisor assigned to the Urban Forestry Section. Staff follows City Ordinance below:

Sec. 20.150.140. - Tree removal.

The parks manager may remove trees from public parkways if the parks manager determines that one or more of the following conditions exist:

1. If a tree is dead, in severe physical decline; or if there is splitting or cracking of major limbs or the tree trunk; or if the tree appears dangerous or obstructive to public safety or travel.
2. If the tree is incurably infected with a disease which will permanently injure, disfigure, or kill it.
3. If there is a conflict between tree roots and sewer lines when:
 - (a) The street tree is located within ten feet of the sewer lateral;
 - (b) Tree roots are evidenced by photographs and/or physical inspection of the sewer line as verified by the parks manager; and
 - (c) Repair methods that allow sewer line repair/replacement to occur with minimal disruption to the tree are deemed inappropriate by the parks manager.
4. If tree growth resulted in sidewalk, curb, or gutter disruption that cannot be reasonably repaired without removing the tree.
5. If the parks manager determines that a specific tree is an inappropriate species, which was not permitted by the city, or conflicts with the city's tree master plan.
6. When the parks manager determines that tree removal is justified to otherwise protect public health, safety, or welfare.

The City Tree Master Plan can be accessed from the City's webpage at:

<https://www.cityofventura.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/23952/12A>

Contact information for the Urban Forestry section can be found at this link:

<https://www.cityofventura.ca.gov/519/Tree-Maintenance>

The website contains information as to where to call or email regarding tree maintenance plus a variety of other specific Urban Forestry related topics.